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Secret Viet study for Nixon stirs furor

By S. J. Micciche
Globe Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON—President Nixon's war policy in Vietnam might be construed as "malfeasance in office" for ignoring National Security Council (NSC) advice given to him three years ago, Sen. Mike Gravel (D-Alaska) declared yesterday.

Thwarted in his effort to make public all of a 500-page NSC memorandum in his possession since last December, Gravel said that from his study of the documents he believes the United States is pursuing an Indochina policy of a "pitiful giant acting petulantly . . . committing murder and genocide."

Gravel's memorandum is a copy of a study made for President Nixon a month after his inauguration in 1969, and contains high-level government opinions on the situation in Indochina at that time and prospects for the future.

Gravel said in effect that the memorandum showed the Nixon policy of Vietnamization would not work without the continued presence of American forces in Vietnam. The document itself contained estimates of the time required for completion of Vietnamization as from 8.3 to 14.4 years, dating from 1969.

Published excerpts regarding the memorandum requested by Mr. Nixon on the day after his inaugural are "very accurate . . . but the only way for objective analysis is to read it all," said Gravel.

The NSC report contains the responses of the State and Defense departments and the Central Intelligence Agency to 28 questions pre-

pared by Presidential adviser Henry Kissinger on the effect of bombing in Vietnam and the overall Indochina policy.

The advice reflected sharp differences between the military and civilian bureaucracy, dividing optimists from pessimists in assessing what had

happened in Vietnam up to early 1969 (when the survey was completed).

While some of these differences have become public knowledge—especially with the publication last year of the Pentagon Papers, which carried the war history up to 1968—the newly revealed study reveals how these diverging viewpoints were extended from the Johnson into the Nixon Administration.

Two broad schools of assessments emerged among the policy planners. In the first group, more optimistic and "hawkish," were the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the US military command in Vietnam, the commander in chief of Pacific forces and the American Embassy in Vietnam, headed by Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker.

Often conflicting with the judgment of those advisers was a second group, composed of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

The first group, the summary of the study says, generally took "a hopeful view of current and future prospects in Vietnam," with State, Defense and the CIA "decidedly more skeptical about the present and pessimistic about the future."

These are some of the major disclosures in the summary:

—"Sound analysis" of the effectiveness of American B52 bomber strikes against enemy forces was rated "impossible" to achieve; but, "the consensus is that some strikes are very effective, some clearly wasted, and a majority with indeterminate outcome." B52s had been used against targets in South Vietnam during the Johnson Administration; they are currently being conducted for the first time against the heartland of North Vietnam, and under a different strategic rationale.

—In early 1969, the optimists concluded that on the basis of programs then in existence, it would take "8.3 years" more to pacify the remaining contested and Viet Cong-controlled population of South Vietnam. The pessimists estimated it would take "13.4 years" more to

achieve that goal.

—In sharp debate over the validity of the "domino theory"—the consequences of a communist takeover in Vietnam—military strategists generally accepted that principle, but most civilian experts concluded that while Cambodia and Laos might be endangered fairly quickly, the loss of Vietnam "would not necessarily unhinge the rest of Asia."

—On Soviet and Chinese military aid to North Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs and the US military command in Saigon said that "if all imports by sea were denied and land routes through Laos and Cambodia attacked vigorously," North Vietnam "could not obtain enough war supplies to continue." But the CIA and the Office of the Secretary of Defense, "in total disagreement," concluded that "overland routes from China alone" could supply North Vietnam with sustaining war material, "even with an unlimited bombing campaign."

President Nixon's subsequent actions in Vietnam have been more in accord with the assessments reached by the pessimists in this study, although his public explanations of his actions have reflected more of what the optimists were claiming in 1969.

In the process, the President has cut US forces in South Vietnam from over a half million at the time he took office to about 80,000 today.

While the National Security Council memorandum discloses sharp disagreements three years ago on the effectiveness of US bombing of North Vietnam, the current battlefield situation in Vietnam is much different from the situation in early 1969 and US airpower is being applied in different ways.

In contrast to the guerrilla attacks or hit-and-run actions by larger units which have dominated the enemy's strategy in the past, the current communist offensive is much more like a conventional battle, with tanks, artillery and massed troops concentrations standing and fighting.

Thus, it is reasoned officially, bombing now is more important.—

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